



Returning to Balance: My Window of Tolerance Worksheet

A gentle self-regulation guide for noticing stress responses and returning to safety, calm, and connection

ROOT Framework™ – Reflect • Observe • Open • Thrive

This worksheet is designed to help me gently recognize when I feel balanced, activated or shut down and to identify simple tools that can support me in returning to a steadier place. I can move through it at my own pace and choose the parts that feel most helpful today.

The Window of Tolerance is the zone where we feel balanced, connected and able to cope with life's challenges. When stress becomes overwhelming, we may move into Hyper-Arousal (fight/flight) or Hypo-Arousal (freeze/shutdown).

Instructions: Take a few quiet moments to read each section, check any signs or strategies that apply to you and use the blank spaces to reflect on your own experiences.

Part 1: My Window of Tolerance

When I am within my Window of Tolerance, I usually:

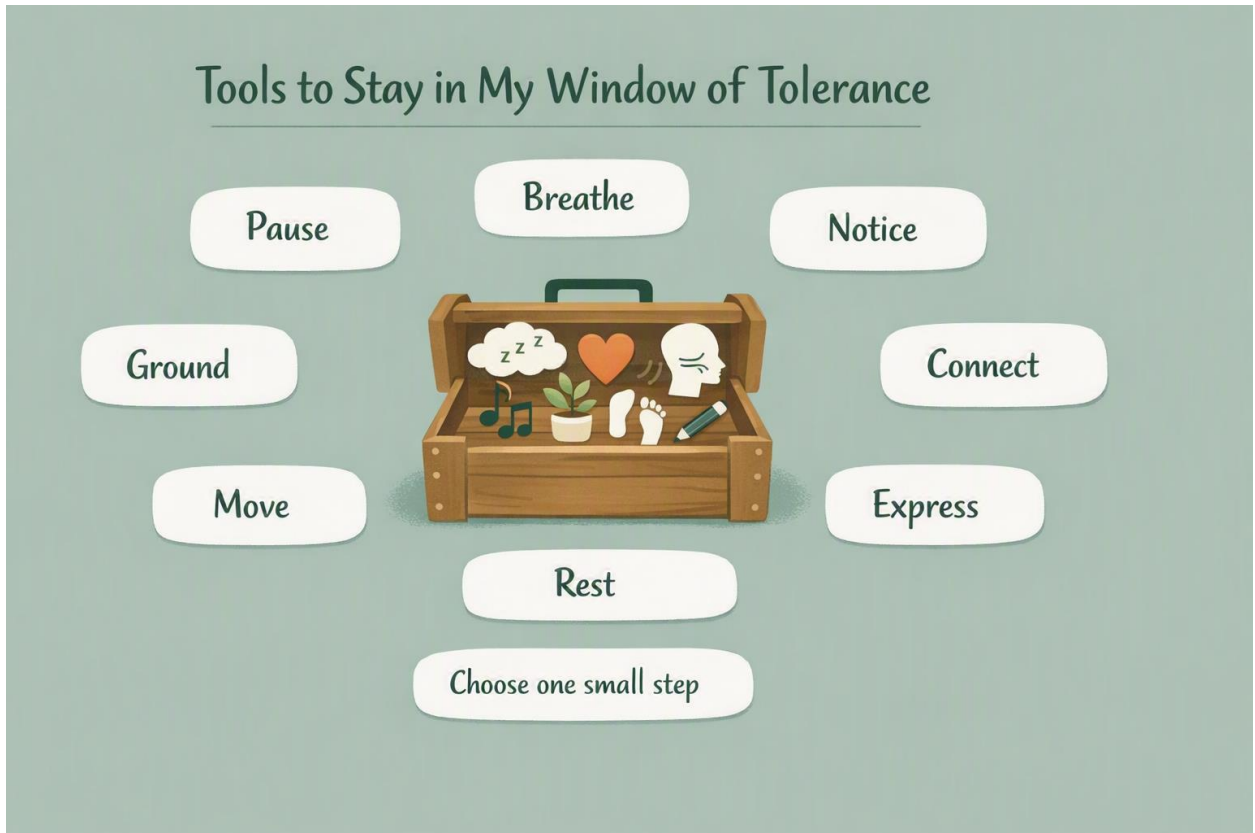
- Feel calm
- Feel safe
- Feel connected
- Think clearly
- Solve problems
- Communicate effectively
- Other: _____

Body cues I may notice when I am within my Window of Tolerance:

- Steady breathing
- Relaxed muscles
- Comfortable energy level
- Open or settled posture
- Able to notice sensations without feeling overwhelmed

Tools to Stay in My Window of Tolerance

These tools can help me notice what is happening inside, slow down and return to a steadier place before stress becomes overwhelming.



- Pause: I can slow down before reacting. Example: I take one quiet moment before I speak or make a choice.
- Breathe: I can take slow breaths with a longer exhale. Example: I breathe in for 4 counts and breathe out for 6 counts.
- Notice: I can name what I feel in my body. Example: I say, “My chest feels tight” or “My shoulders feel tense.”
- Ground: I can use my senses to return to the present moment. Example: I name 5 things I see, 4 things I feel, and 3 things I hear.
- Connect: I can reach out to a safe person. Example: I send a short text saying, “Can you check in with me?”
- Move: I can stretch, walk, or gently move my body. Example: I roll my shoulders, stretch my hands, or take a short walk.
- Express: I can write, draw, talk, or name my feelings. Example: I write one sentence about what I am feeling right now.



- Rest: I can take a break before I feel overwhelmed. Example: I step away, lower stimulation, or sit quietly for a few minutes.
- Choose one small step: I can do the next kind, manageable thing. Example: I drink water, wash my face, reply to one message, or tidy one small area.

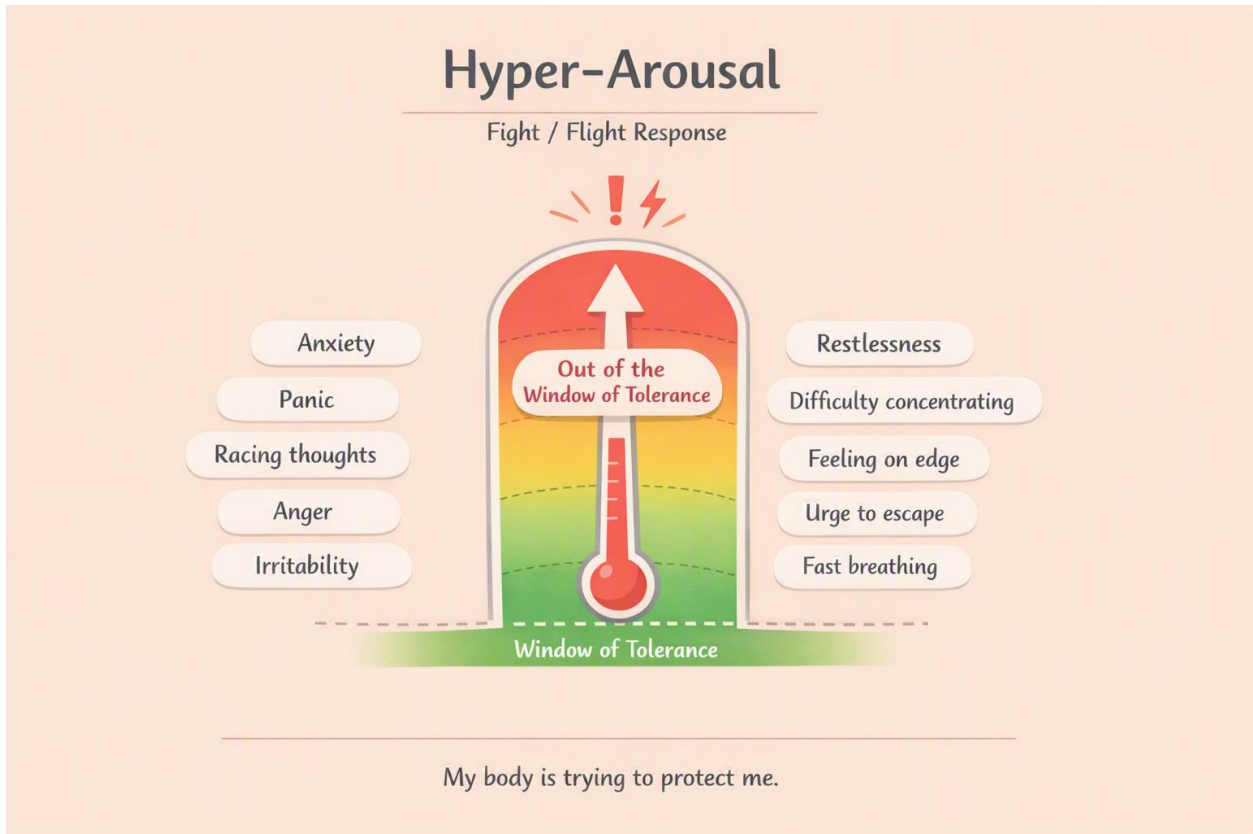
Daily Practice Ideas

Practicing these tools in small ways each day can make them easier to use during stress. Even 30 second count.

- Morning check-in: I ask myself, “Am I calm, activated or shut down?”
- One-minute breathing: I practice a slow exhale once or twice a day.
- Transition pause: I ground myself before work, after driving, before meals, or before bed.
- One tool per day: I choose one tool from the toolbox and practice it intentionally.
- Pair with a habit: I breathe before checking my phone, stretch after brushing my teeth, or notice body cues before meals.
- Calm cue: I repeat a supportive phrase such as, “I can slow down” or “I am here now.”
- End-of-day reflection: I write one sentence about what helped me today.

Today, the tool that helped me most was: _____

Part 2: Hyper-Arousal (Fight / Flight)



Signs I may be moving into Hyper-Arousal:

- Anxiety
- Panic
- Racing thoughts
- Anger
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Difficulty concentrating

Body cues I may notice in Hyper-Arousal:

- Tight chest or shoulders
- Fast or shallow breathing
- Racing heart
- Clenched jaw or fists
- Feeling hot, shaky or restless



- Stomach tension or nausea

Triggers that may lead me here:

Part 3: Hypo-Arousal (Freeze / Shutdown)

Signs I may be moving into Hypo-Arousal:

- Numbness
- Exhaustion
- Withdrawal
- Isolation
- Feeling disconnected
- Lack of motivation

Body cues I may notice in Hypo-Arousal:

- Heavy or tired body
- Low energy or slow movement
- Numbness or reduced sensation
- Feeling cold, distant or disconnected
- Flat facial expression or quiet voice
- Difficulty noticing hunger, thirst or physical needs

Triggers that may lead me here:

Part 4: What Helps Me Return to Balance?

Different strategies may help depending on whether I feel activated, anxious, restless, shut down, numb, or disconnected. I can check the strategies that feel supportive for me.

General strategies I can try:

- Deep breathing or slow exhale breathing
- Walking or gentle movement
- Spending time in nature



- Listening to calming music
- Journaling thoughts or feelings
- Stretching or relaxing tense muscles
- Talking with a supportive person
- Using grounding through the five senses
- Drinking water or eating something nourishing
- Taking a break from screens or stimulation
- Other: _____

When I feel hyper-aroused, I can try:

- Lengthening my exhale
- Placing both feet on the floor and noticing support beneath me
- Naming five things I can see around me
- Lowering noise, light, or other stimulation
- Using a calm phrase such as “I am safe in this moment”
- Moving slowly instead of rushing

When I feel hypo aroused, I can try:

- Gentle movement, stretching or standing up
- Splashing cool water on my face or holding something textured
- Opening curtains or stepping into natural light
- Reaching out to a safe person by text, phone or in person
- Doing one small task to reconnect with the present moment
- Reminding myself that shutdown is a stress response, not a failure

Part 5: My Personal Support Plan

Early Warning Signs:

What I Will Do:

1. _____
2. _____



3. _____

Who Can Support Me?

Safety/support reminder: If I feel unsafe, at risk of harming myself or someone else, or unable to cope, I can reach out to a trusted support person, contact a mental health professional, call a local crisis line or seek emergency help right away.

Reflection

What have I learned about my emotions and stress responses?

One small step I can take this week to support my Window of Tolerance is:

"Emotions are not problems to fix. They are signals to notice, understand, and respond to with compassion."

"My nervous system is learning safety one small step at a time."

Disclaimer: This worksheet is for educational and self-reflection purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional mental health support, diagnosis, or treatment. If I feel unsafe, at risk of harming myself or someone else or unable to cope, I can contact a trusted support person, mental health professional, local crisis line or emergency services right away.

Thank you for taking time to listen to yourself with care. Each small moment of awareness, practice, and support is a meaningful step toward balance.